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# Everywhere & Nowhere: Contemporary Feminism in the United States by Jo Reger

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**Reger, Jo. *Everywhere & Nowhere: Contemporary Feminism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. x + 242 pages. Cloth, \$24.95.**

As someone who was an active participant in the civil rights movement of the 1960s, I am troubled to hear that Wisconsin has repealed a long-standing equal pay law. I am one of those second wavers who cringe to see young women objectify themselves by wearing highly sexualized clothing such as stiletto heels. Sociologist Jo Reger also has her moments. She recounts sitting on a porch in Ohio, reflecting on a community where many value the opinions of Rush Limbaugh or Glen Beck. As reminds readers, it may seem like feminism is “nowhere,” yet the changes that it has wrought on American society mean that it is in fact “everywhere.” As she observes, more women than men vote and earn college degrees. So how does one sort out this seemingly strange concurrence of “nowhere-everywhere” feminism?

In *Everywhere and Nowhere*, Reger investigates the idea of a nowhere-everywhere feminism through the lens of conventional social movement theory. She incorporates sociologist Michael Burawoy’s Extended Case Method and uses a convenience sample containing forty self-identified feminists dispersed across three networks. These networks are identified using the pseudonyms of Woodview, Evers, and Green City. Her objective is to elicit narratives on feminism that include how members of each network became feminists, how they view contemporary and second wave feminism, what their organizational goals are, and how they understand the community context in which they live. Reger proposes that this approach will generate theoretical links between environmental context, identity, and generational connections.

Woodview is a predominantly right-wing Christian community located in the Midwest. The vast majority of residents are white and work for large corporations. Students at the local university are described as “apolitical” and “unwilling to critique the dominant culture” (p. 33-34). One exception is a group calling itself the Forum for Women (FFW). This organization serves as a safe haven. Within this community context, a key narrative involves a lesbian member of the FFW. This young woman experienced a brutal rape by a man outraged at her sexual orientation. Her choice of sexuality also resulted in estrangement from parents who forced her to leave home. Though members of the FFW report mothers who encouraged them to realize their full potential, Woodview represents a contradiction between personal experience and messages of empowerment. In this community, freedom of choice is preached, but not necessarily practiced. Evers is an East Coast town of approximately 29,000 people. It is described as an isolated liberal mecca that is very accepting of alternative lifestyles. There is no organized feminist presence, but more than half of the women interviewed report mothers who identify as feminists. Daughters are described as distancing themselves from the feminism of previous generations because it is expressed in theoretical terms with little practical impact. In this community, young women grapple with the theory-practice dilemma. Green City is associated with several universities and colleges but is not a college town like Woodview or Evers. The majority of residents are white and registered Democrats. Over half of the population moved into the area due to its progressive culture. Activist organizations are described as abundant and residents are portrayed as “Hippie” in outlook (p. 47). It is home to several well-known second wave feminist writers. A bookstore serves as a feminist anchor.

A generational theme weaves its way through each case. This thread begins with Reger’s critique of the “wave metaphor” (p. 7). Reger argues that wave discourse neglects the contributions made by “. . . women of color, lesbian, poor and working class women . . .” (p. 8). It is also purported to lack a symbolic framework for those who come to feminism between waves. Reger points to Evers as an example of as a place where young feminists deliver a harsh

critique of second wave feminism as a means to construct their own space. This has resulted in a feminism that values freedom of choice with a focus on changing culture not institutions. Reger further describes the development of contemporary feminism as grounded in misunderstandings. The critiques leveled by contemporary feminists indicate a poor understanding of a complex feminist history. Reger, however, seems to argue that a lack of knowledge about past feminist history has resulted in a more robust social movement because critique allows a springboard of sorts adding energy to the contemporary feminist movement. I find this argument difficult to embrace, as it seems problematic to advance a social movement on lack of information. However, I can hear Reger's retort that social movements are built on "complexity, multiplicity and contradiction" (p. 190). She further clarifies stating that it is only during times of "crisis or opportunity" that the feminist movement will appear unified and coherent (p. 190).

As I began to read *Nowhere and Everywhere*, I thought I would face a gloomy assessment of today's feminism. I am happy to report that this is not the case. The book is hopeful and concludes with kudos to the young feminists of Woodview, Evers, and Green City. Reger has inspired a second waver who will no longer cringe when she sees stiletto heels. It seems I have been operating under my own misunderstandings of contemporary feminism.

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